maintain his equipment. The list ends, by graduation, with the record of a route 26.25 miles long, out of Hayward, Wisconsin. The mail handled averages 10,269 pieces a month. The carrier spends three hours and one minute in the office and two hours and six minutes on the road, making five hours and seven minutes devoted daily to his job. He receives a salary of $1,860, or $30 a year more than the carrier out of Phoenix who handles nearly twice as much mail and devotes nearly twice as much time to the handling. But both of the two routes are way above the average and if all the margins were no worse there would probably be no ground for complaint. But the margin of difference between the business handled and the compensation given for the operation of those two routes is insignificant as compared with others that exist.

Out of Mt. Washington, Missouri, there is operated a route 24¼ miles long, on which the carrier distributes 53,769 pieces of mail, on the average, each month, or 2,068 pieces during each working day. The carrier works from 5 a. m., until 5 p. m., and is paid $1,800 a year.

Not long ago the department learned of a route, issuing from a town in Georgia, that the carrier covered usually in one and a half hours a day. He was paid $2,000 a year. In that and other like cases the department does what it can to increase the work of the carrier by enlarging his route.

But, under the restrictions governing the operation of the R. F. D. mails, the routes cannot always be rearranged so as to place the work upon them on anything like par with other routes that pay no more—often less—and involve much more work.

Compare the route out of Mt. Washington, Missouri, with the following ones, taken at random, from compilations based on business done during the month of July this year:

Route 1 out of Brinson, Missouri: 2,598 pieces of mail handled a month; carrier devotes an average of four hours and nine minutes to the work; covers 23.75 miles and is paid $1,728 a year.

Route 3 out of Sadieville, Kentucky: 3,886 pieces of mail handled a month; carrier devotes five hours and nine minutes a day to duty of attending route; covers 25.84 miles and is paid $1,860 a year.

Though scores of cases like them could be given, the two cases are in some respects extremes. But they come nearer representing the average R. F. D. route than do the ones out of Phoenix, Arizona, Hayward, Wisconsin, or Mt. Washington, Missouri.

Everything else being equal, which route would you rather serve—one that would take all your working time, or one that would allow one-half or more of the day to attend some private business—one on which you would have to have a costly vehicle or one that could be served from a motorcycle? The answer is obvious.

The carrier with an easily handled route would be a fool if he built up its business to the point whereby it could not be so easily handled; for in either case, under the present system, his pay is the same—aye, equipment requirements usually cause his net pay to decline as business grows.

Hence there is no incentive for a carrier building up business on his route; quite the contrary. Increased business means for him more work, and bigger deductions from his salary for equipment and its upkeep; and, unless it comes about through extending the length of his route, with no possibility of extra allowance to take care of the added burden.

The kind of increased business that would add most to the burden of the carrier is that involving fourth-class or parcel post matter, for with it bulk and weight are the prime factors. Thus while it is to the interest of the carrier to hold all business down to the lowest minimum compatible with the existence of the route, it is especially to his advantage to prevent the development of parcel post business. Invariably, as is not the case with other classes of mail, a large volume of parcel post matter means more substantial equipment than the average carrier feels that he should be called on to provide.

It is doubtful if any other class of government employes can wield as much political influence and power as the R. F. D. carriers, by reason of their peculiar situation, possess. Invariably, they are first-class men, attentive to their work, accommodating to their patrons, and in every way personally likable. Each comes in daily and ingratiating contact with a large number of people who are out of intimate contact with general affairs. Acting concertedly, as they may do for they are well organized, they can give a Congressman or Senator more trouble than he may fear from any other group of constituents. Influenced by the pressure of circumstances, if nothing more, the average member of Congress is very attentive to the wishes of the rural carriers among his constituents.

"I attribute my continuance in Congress more to the close attention I give to matters having to do with the rural mails, especially those having to do with the interests of the carriers and small postmasters, than to any other feature of my work in Washington," said a Congressman to the writer only recently."

Congressional tenderness for R. F. D. carriers is shown by how they have fared in the matter of salary increases. Beginning with the establishment of the first permanent routes, the base pay, in 1897, was $300 a year. Since that time not more than three out of a dozen Congresses have failed to add to the salaries of carriers, who now receive a base pay of $1,800 a year. No other class of government employe has had anything like such treatment in the way of salary increases, and at none of the varying rates allowed during the last tweny-three years has the department had serious difficulty in getting capable carriers for the R. F. D. jobs.

Let it be said, however, that the pay on the whole is not excessive; in a great many cases it is yet entirely too low, even niggardly. Though it involves what is tantamount to a subsidy of $70,000,000 on R. F. D. mail service, the expenditure is entirely justified, *per se*, by the benefits to all the country from the general distribution of information the R. F. D.'s make possible.

It is not on the maintenance of the R. F. D. system, whatever the monetary cost to taxpayers who do not use it, that gives cause for complaint; it is the fact that the benefits and savings that the expenditure makes possible are realized upon to only an inexcusably small extent.

This is due, say Post Office Department experts, to the faulty way by which the expenditure is distributed. And the faulty way, say they, is attributable to the restrictions imposed by Congress on the postal service in regard to the expenditure. For example:

"You need not worry about motor routes interfering with your services," a Congressman said in a circular letter to the R. F. D. carriers in his district during a political campaign a few years ago.

The import of his statement is found in the congressional restriction on the establishment of rural routes on which the use of motor cars may be required.

While the Post Office Department may establish an old style horse-drawn route on its own motion anywhere, it cannot set up a motor route without the consent of a majority of the patrons to be served. That sounds very democratic, but there is a subtle joker in the restriction, which is solely to impede progress wherever it may interfere with the interests of individuals.

Naturally the development of roads and the increase of population necessary to make a motor rural route practicable take place in territory already served by the old style R. F. D. routes. It is easy for a carrier who can use a motor for ten months or more of the year to serve about twice the territory and patrons as the one who depends on a horse-drawn vehicle. The maximum length of a horse-drawn route is fixed by law at 36 miles. The minimum length of a motor rural route is 50 miles. The department, for some congressional reason by no means obvious, cannot set up any kind of route of a length between 36 and 50 miles. The establishment of a 50-mile or more motor route generally means the consolidation of two horse-drawn routes into one or three into two. Hence somebody invariably loses a job. There you are—that's the joker in the seemingly good old-fashioned democratic requirement that no patron of the R. F. D. mails shall be forced, against his wishes, to get his mail from a motor car instead of a buggy, light wagon, or a horse's back. It is a sorry man who as carrier can't get the majority of his patrons to withhold their names from a petition that may mean the loss of his job.

Hence, though this is the age of motorization and the horse is disappearing even from the fields (see United States Census reports now being issued) the use of motor cars is required by the government on only 840 out of 43,470 R. F. D. mail routes now in operation. And the number hasn't increased for several years.

For years the Post Office Department has urged Congress to permit the fundamentals of the entire system to be changed. What it has asked is that a fixed sum, as at present, be appropriated for the support of the rural mails and that its distribution be left in large part to the department. Instead of a uniform salary being fixed for carriers, regardless of their difficulties and the service each may render, Congress has been urged to fix a minimum wage below which no salary can go, and then to let further compensation be based on mileage covered, the equipment used and the business handled. Such an arrangement would make for the steady growth of the rural mails.

Take the Mt. Washington, Missouri route, heretofore referred to. During the month that there was distributed thereon 53,769 pieces of mail, only 170 pieces of parcel post mail were delivered on and not a single piece was taken up for shipment from the route. Yet the route runs through a rich, producing section contiguous to Kansas City, where there are a half-million consumers taxed heavily for the excessive cost of distributing food, some of which they could get from the nearly 3,000 producers on the rural route in question as easily as a letter may pass between them.

Realizing the possibilities of those 3,000 producers dealing, via the mails, directly with Kansas City consumers, the Post Office Department twice changed the source of the route from the suburb of Mt. Washington to a sub-station of the Kansas City Post Office. The change involved a shift of only a few miles.

But the carrier evidently didn't want to live in Kansas City, and the postmaster at Mt. Washington, whose income probably was reduced because of the loss of the business that arose on the route, didn't like the shift. Hence on each occasion such a row was kicked up that the department was forced to restore the status of the route. The people along the route evidently backed up the carrier and the postmaster.

With the route running from Kansas City, a patron might ship a 50-pound case of eggs directly to a Kansas City consumer at a cost of 29 cents. When the route originated from Mt. Washington the charge on the same shipment was 54 cents. Like differences prevailed on other parcel post matter passing between patrons of the route and Kansas City. But the patrons were not interested in that, because they were accustomed to making virtually no use of the parcel post privilege. And from the figures it may be assumed they had never been encouraged to make use of it; so when the carrier and postmaster kicked at the change, the patrons were ready to back them up probably for personal reasons alone.

As the patrons of the rural mails have never been encouraged, as a whole, to make use of the parcel post—the mail facility which makes it vastly to their advantage to be linked up as closely as possible with consuming markets—they usually defer all questions of their own interests in the premises to the wishes of the carriers and the postmasters.

Therefore, the average Congressman finds it to be highly to his own political interests to keep in good favor with the carriers and the postmasters who, in turn, will promote good will for him among the patrons of the rural mails.

Thus a vicious cycle, fanned by "pork" and patronage and sustained by manipulation, is set up and kept going. In a majority of congressional districts, the expenditure on rural mails is in great part largess. The annual appropriation for R. F. D. mails is now $86,800,000. It has increased to the extent of about $45,000,000 in eight years. And the increase has been virtually for salaries alone; for in the last eight years only $500,000 has been given for additions to the service.

Figures collected last July show that all the postage collected from mail matter going to or arising from rural routes totals only $51,502,331. The R. F. D.'s, it is estimated, perform only one-fourth of the service attached to the handling of that mail; which means that the patrons of the rural mails pay approximately $12,500,000 of the $86,800,000 spent on delivering mail to their door. The rest is borne by other patrons of the mails and the taxpayers generally. Hence the average Congressman with a district serried by R. F. D. routes is interested largely in getting his district's full part of the appropriation which, by strict analysis, is 75 per cent subsidy. The distribution of funds, rather than the character of the service they might make possible, most engages the thought of the lawmaker.

And to that vicious condition may in large part be attributed the failure of the parcel post as a convenience and a saving to the millions of producers remote from buying or selling markets. Where in practice it is of one item of help to the farmer, the parcel post is of a thousand items of help to big business which didn't need it. In fact, the figures would indicate that town and city people are the ones who chiefly use the parcel post in dealing with the big mail order houses.

What might be done with a soundly organized and directed R. F. D. mails service, is shown by what has been accomplished during recent years through experiments in branches of the postal service not so severely restricted by congressional legislation.

Several truck routes operated between producing sections and large cities, on a strictly business basis, with big automobile vehicles owned by the government and run by salaried postal employes, proved highly successful.

Star routes that have been put under direct government operation and likewise conducted have also been successful. One of that kind operated between Price and Vernal, Utah, increased the volume of business from 199,000 to more than 700,000 pounds a month in less than a year. They point out to you on that star route a bank building that, in the form of bundles of brick and other materials, was shipped hundreds of miles across the desert by parcel post.

But all efforts to build up parcel post business between the patrons of the ordinarily conducted rural routes and the consuming towns and cities have been virtual failures. The volume of that business today, despite the complaints about the heavy tolls taken by middlemen, is scarcely larger than it was three or four years ago.

It means that the government established a great facility for distribution and then said, in effect, that any consequential use of it shall be penalized. Hence it is employed only to the extent of about five per cent of the possible and not more than 10 per cent of the easily practicable—that is the R. F. D. mails as they exist today probably could be used in ten times the prevailing volume without entailing a cent of extra expense to the government.

(C) U. & U.

**Above—This postal truck for a time connected Maryland farms, far from rai roads, with the consuming public of Washington, D. C. The mail development thus begun has been practically abandoned, but not because the experiment was a failure.**

**Below—This mail truck shows how the postal service can utilize the motor car in facilitating distribution of foodstuffs—but comparatively few are so used.**